TWO

DISCOURSES, &c.

[Price Three Shillings.]

Reynolds Works
K.

BRITISH MUSEUM

A

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED AT THE

OPENING

OF THE

ROYAL ACADEMY,

OCTOBER 16, 1780,

BY THE

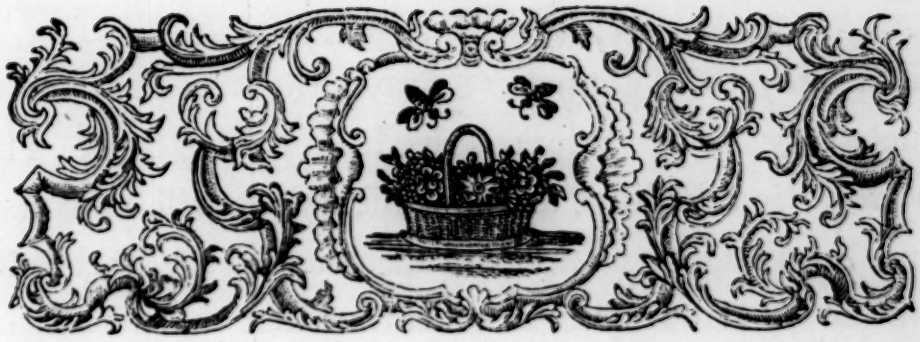
PRESIDENT.

for K see half title

LONDON:

Printed by THOMAS CADELL, PRINTER to the ROYAL ACADEMY.

M.DCC.LXXXI.



A

DISCOURSE, &c.

GENTLEMEN,

THE honor which the Arts acquire by being permitted to take poſſeſſion of this noble habitation, is one of the moſt conſiderable of the many inſtances we have received of his MAJESTY's protection; and the ſtrongeſt proof of his deſire to make the Academy reſpectable.

NOTHING has been left undone that might contribute to excite our purſuit, or to reward our attainments. We

 have

have already the happineſs of ſeeing the Arts in a ſtate to which they never before arrived in this nation. This Building, in which we are now aſſembled, will remain to many future ages an illuſtrious ſpecimen of the Architect's abilities. It is our duty to endeavour that thoſe who gaze with wonder at the ſtructure, may not be diſappointed when they viſit the apartments. It will be no ſmall addition to the glory which this nation has already acquired from having given birth to eminent men in every part of ſcience, if it ſhould be enabled to produce, in conſequence of this inſtitution, a School of Engliſh Artiſts. The eſtimation in which we ſtand in reſpect to our neighbours, will be in proportion to the degree in which we excel, or are inferior to them in the acquiſition of intellectual excellence, of which Trade and its conſequential riches muſt be acknowledged to give the means; but a people whoſe whole attention is abſorbed in thoſe means, and who forget the end, can aſpire but little above the rank of a barbarous nation. Every eſtabliſhment that tends to the cultivation of the pleaſures of the mind, as diſtinct from thoſe of ſenſe, may be conſidered as an inferior ſchool of morality, where the mind is poliſhed and prepared for higher attainments.

Let us for a moment take a ſhort ſurvey of the progreſs of the mind towards what is, or ought to be, its true object of attention. Man, in his loweſt ſtate, has no pleaſures but thoſe of ſenſe, and no wants but thoſe of appetite; afterwards, when ſociety is divided into different ranks, and ſome are appointed to labour for the ſupport of others, thoſe whom their ſuperiority ſets free from labour, begin to look for intellectual entertainments. Thus, whilſt the ſhepherds were attending their flocks, their maſters made the firſt obſervations on aſtronomy; ſo muſic is ſaid to have had its origin from a man at leiſure liſtening to the ſtrokes of a hammer.

As the ſenſes, in the loweſt ſtate of nature, are neceſſary to direct us to our ſupport, when that ſupport is once ſecure there is danger in following them further; to him who has no rule of action but the gratification of the ſenſes, plenty is always dangerous; it is therefore neceſſary to the happineſs of individuals, and ſtill more neceſſary to the ſecurity of ſociety, that the mind ſhould be elevated to the idea of general beauty, and the contemplation of general truth; by this purſuit the mind is always carried forward in ſearch of ſomething more excellent than it finds, and obtains its proper ſuperiority over the common ſenſes of life; by learning to feel itſelf capable of higher

aims, and of nobler enjoyments. In this gradual exaltation of human nature, every art contributes its contingent towards the general ſupply of mental pleaſure. Whatever abſtracts the thoughts from ſenſual gratifications; whatever teaches us to look for happineſs within ourſelves, muſt advance in ſome meaſure the dignity of our nature.

PERHAPS there is no higher proof of the excellency of man than this, that to a mind properly cultivated whatever is bounded is little. The mind is continually labouring to advance, ſtep by ſtep, through ſucceſſive gradations of excellence towards perfection, which is dimly ſeen, at a great though not hopeleſs diſtance, and which we muſt always follow becauſe we never can attain; but the purſuit rewards itſelf; one truth teaches another, and our ſtore is always inereaſing, though nature can never be exhauſted. Our art, like all arts which addreſs the imagination, is applied to ſomewhat a lower faculty of the mind, which approaches nearer to ſenſuality; but through ſenſe and fancy it muſt make its way to reaſon; for ſuch is the progreſs of thought, that we perceive by ſenſe, we combine by fancy, and diſtinguiſh by reaſon; and without carrying our art out of its natural and true character, the more we purify it from every thing that is groſs in ſenſe,

ſenſe, in that proportion we advance its uſe and dignity; and in proportion as we lower it to mere ſenſuality we pervert its nature, and degrade it from the rank of a liberal art; and this is what every artiſt ought well to remember. Let him remember alſo, that he deſerves juſt ſo much encouragement in the ſtate, as he makes himſelf a member of it virtuouſly uſeful, and contributes in his ſphere to the general purpoſe and perfection of ſociety.

The Art which we profeſs has beauty for its object; this it is our buſineſs to diſcover and to expreſs; but the beauty of which we are in queſt is general and intellectual; it is an idea that ſubſiſts only in the mind; the ſight never beheld it, nor has the hand expreſſed it: it is an idea reſiding in the breaſt of the artiſt, which he is always labouring to impart, and which he dies at laſt without imparting; but which he is yet ſo far able to communicate as to raiſe the thoughts, and extend the views of the ſpectator; and which, by a ſucceſſion of art, may be ſo far diffuſed, that its effects may extend themſelves imperceptibly into public benefits, and be among the means of beſtowing on whole nations refinement of taſte; which if it does not lead directly to purity of manners, obviates at leaſt their greateſt depravation,

depravation, by diſentangling the mind from appetite, and conducting the thoughts through ſucceſſive ſtages of excellence, till that contemplation of univerſal rectitude and harmony which began by Taſte, may, as it is exalted and refined, conclude in Virtue.

THE END.

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